

The French Revolution

STATING THE ISSUE

CHAPTER

9

A revolution is a major reorganization of government and society that involves violence and results in replacing one governing group with another. Many of the events that newspapers call revolutions do not fall under this definition. For example, most of the changes of government in Africa and Latin America are not revolutions but rather so-called coups d'état. That is, these countries have changed their rulers by violence or the threat of violence, but they have not changed the basic structure of their government or their society.

Modern historians have classified true revolutions into six types. This chapter focuses on one of these types, sometimes called the Great Revolution. Great revolutions create major changes in a society. They change its political and social structure, they influence who controls property, and they spark the development of new philosophies to explain people's proper relationships within the society. Great revolutions separate one age in a nation's history from those that follow.

Great revolutions have both underlying causes and immediate causes. The underlying causes create a potentially explosive situation. The immediate causes set off the spark that leads to the actual revolt.

Chapter 9 analyzes the causes of the revolution in eighteenth-century France and traces its developments. Although the revolt did not break out until 1789, the events that caused it took place over many years. Understanding the causes of this violent revolution in one society can help you learn how to analyze similar events in the modern world.

38 THE OLD REGIME

By 1789 France was the most advanced country in Europe. Its 24 million people had been united in a single national state for centuries. In contrast, England and Scotland together numbered only 10 million people, and they had been united officially for less than a century. Paris was second only to London in size, and it was the center of the intellectual movement of the time. France was also Europe's richest nation. France's foreign trade had increased five times since the death of Louis XIV. It now exported more goods to the rest of Europe than England did. In addition, France had the strongest military force in Europe.

But none of these developments had affected France's government, which had changed little since Louis XIV's death. France remained an authoritarian state. The king continued to rule without the help of the French parliament, the Estates-General, which had not met since

1614. Instead of asking representatives of his subjects for advice, the king depended on appointed officials. Nobles dominated government service, the army, and the higher church offices. And their power and influence continued to rise.

France's social system also remained much as it had been since feudal times. Everyone belonged to one of three estates, or classes, of society. The First Estate was the clergy, which made up less than 1 percent of the population. The Second Estate was the nobility, forming less than 2 percent of the population. The Third Estate included everyone else.

The church had a far greater influence than its size would suggest. It was the largest individual landowner in France, with between 5 and 10 percent of the nation's land. But the profits from this land were divided unequally. Most of them went to the small percentage of higher clergy who came from the nobility.

The nobility owned about 20 percent of the land, but they did not raise crops or livestock themselves. Instead, they rented out their land to peasants, who made up most of the Third Estate. Each peasant farmed a small plot for which he had to pay a complex variety of dues. In addition, the nobles kept certain feudal privileges, such as the right to hunt on their land.

The peasants resented the dues they had to pay as well as the nobles' privileges, particularly since the landowners did little to improve conditions on their property. But on the whole, the peasants were better off in France than elsewhere in Europe. Many of them owned their own farms, about 40 percent of the nation's land.

Working people in the towns also belonged to the Third Estate. These people shared none of the privileges of the nobles and clergy. Although most of them were probably as well off as people of similar positions in other countries, their standard of living was low compared to the French upper classes. Then during the eighteenth century, they were hit hard by inflation. Prices rose by about 65 percent while wages rose by only about 22 percent. As a result, town workers began to resent their position in French society.

In addition to the town workers, the Third Estate also contained a rising middle class made up of merchants, legal and governmental workers, and other professional people. Throughout the eighteenth century, this group increased in power and wealth. Because so much prestige went along with land ownership, many wealthy members of this group bought land. By 1789 they owned almost 20 percent of French land. For this reason, the rising middle class had become rivals of the nobility.

Reading 38 contains four excerpts from eighteenth-century documents that dramatize some of the social, political, and economic condi-

tions of eighteenth-century France discussed in this introduction. As you read, keep the following questions in mind:

1. What complaints did various groups within the French population have against the conditions under which they lived?
2. What caused these conditions? Who did these people blame?

Jean Jacques Rousseau Dines with a French Peasant

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the most important intellectuals and writers of the eighteenth century. In 1732 he traveled through central France. The following account tells of his meeting with a French peasant during his travels.

Having turned off the road one day to take a closer look at an attractive spot, I lost my way. After several hours of wandering around, I went into a peasant's hut. In Switzerland, peasants have enough resources to help a stranger, and I expected the same hospitality in France. I offered to pay for my dinner. He gave me skimmed milk and some coarse bread made of barley, saying that it was all he had. I ate hungrily, but did not get enough to satisfy my appetite.

The peasant watched me closely and listened to my story. After a while, he said that he judged me to be a good and honorable young man, not a person who had come to betray him for money. So he opened a little trapdoor near the kitchen and went down some stairs. He soon reappeared with a nice brown loaf of bread made of wheat, a piece of ham, and a bottle of wine. To this he added an omelette, and I enjoyed an excellent dinner.

When I offered again to pay him, his anxiety returned. He refused to take my money. When I asked him why, he at last said with a shudder "revenue-officers and excisemen." He told me that he hid his wine and bread so that he would not have to pay the excise tax and that he was a lost man if anyone suspected that he had money. I never forgot what he said. It began in my heart the hatred against oppression from which these people suffer. This man did not dare to eat the bread which he had earned by the sweat of his brow and could only escape financial ruin by pretending to be poor. I left his house angry and touched because a beautiful country had fallen prey to barbarous farmers of taxes.

Jean Jacques Rousseau,
Confessions (London: 1904),
pp. 148-149. Language
simplified.

Tax collectors gave rewards
to people who told them of
property owners with goods
on which taxes had not
been paid.

Revenue-officers and
excisemen were tax
collectors.

An English Physician Comments on Life in Paris

John Moore, an English physician, traveled on the European continent for a year. He wrote the following account in 1779.

Everything in France has been arranged for the benefit of the rich and powerful. Little or nothing is done, however, for the comfort of the average citizen. This conclusion strikes the visitor as soon as he enters Paris.

The city of London is lighted at night. In addition, the city has raised sidewalks along the streets for the comfort and convenience of pedestrians. Paris, however, is poorly lighted and has only one or two raised footpaths. People who cannot afford carriages must grope their way along. They must duck behind pillars or run into shops to avoid being run down by carriages. Coachmen drive carriages as near to the walls as they like, scattering people before them.

In France monarchy has been raised on high. The monarch has lost sight of the bulk of the nation. He pays attention only to the few members of the nobility who come within his sight at the court.

An English Agricultural Reformer Describes a French Peasant Woman

Arthur Young visited France in 1787, 1788, and 1789. He was particularly interested in agricultural conditions which the following incident concerns.

I was walking up a long hill to ease my mare when a poor woman joined me. She complained about the times, and said it was a sad country. She said that her husband had but a small piece of land, one cow, and a poor little horse. Yet they had to pay forty-two pounds of wheat and three chickens as tax to one lord and eighty-eight pounds of oats, one chicken, and a shilling to another. In addition, they had to pay heavy land taxes as well as other taxes.

John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany* (London: 1803), Vol. I, pp. 27-28. Language simplified.

►To what degree should society try to provide for the comfort of all citizens rather than only of a small group?

Arthur Young, *Travels in France*, Miss Betham-Edwards, ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1892), pp. 197-198. Language simplified.

Nobles were exempt from paying land taxes.

People said, she reported, that some of the great folks were going to help the poor ones. She did not know who they were or how they might help. But she said that the taxes and special privileges were destroying the peasants. From a short distance, this woman appeared to be sixty or seventy years old. Her body was bent with labor and her face covered with lines. But she was only twenty-eight.

An Englishman who has not traveled cannot imagine the appearance of most French countrywomen. They probably work harder than the men. This work, combined with women's labor of bringing a new race of slaves into the world, destroys feminine appearance. This attitude toward women in France can be traced directly to the government.

►Should women who have children work outside the home? Why or why not?

A French Noble Comments on the Rising Middle Class

The Marquis de Bouillé (1739-1800) was an enlightened French nobleman. During the revolution, he took part in an unsuccessful attempt to help the royal family escape. His comments about the middle class that follow apply to France in the 1770's and 1780's.

Marquis de Bouillé,
Memoires, ed. F. Barrière
(Paris: 1859), p. 123.
Translated by Edwin Fenton.

The riches which commerce brought to the kingdom went only to commoners because the prejudices of the nobles did not allow them to enter commerce or manufacturing. The increase in wealth contributed to inflation, and inflation cut back the wealth of landowners who received a fixed money income. Trade also caused the growth of cities, some of which became as large as the capitals of other countries. The nobles left their estates to ruin themselves in Paris. But the commoners stayed home and piled up wealth. All the little towns became centers of commerce and manufacturing. They were filled with the middle classes who were richer and more industrious than the nobles. Many of them administered the lands of the great landowners and made money at it.

The middle class received a better education than the nobles. They needed an education more since they had to earn a living while the nobility got government jobs although many of them had neither talent nor merit. The middle class, meanwhile, got only secondary positions. Both in Paris and in the provincial towns the middle class was superior to the nobility in wealth, talent, and personal merit. Although well aware of their superiority, they were constantly humiliated. Military regulations kept them from leading positions in the army. They were

kept out of the upper clergy because bishops and other top officials were chosen from the nobility. Even the judges rejected them. Most courts admitted only nobles to membership.

FOR THOUGHT:

Under what circumstances might the various groups who suffered under the Old Regime have decided to unite to change their society?

39 THE REVOLUTION IN PEOPLE'S MINDS

Reading 38 showed that many people in eighteenth-century France had serious complaints about their lives. Peasants complained about having to pay taxes or dues to the government, the landowners, and the Church. The rising middle class complained because the nobility had so many more privileges than they did as well as greater prestige. Wage earners complained about inflation. And many members of the nobility and the clergy complained because the king ruled France without consulting them.

Two of these groups of people—the middle class and the nobility—had much in common despite the differences in their positions. Both groups were educated. Both owned property of some sort. Both wanted a larger voice in political decision-making. In the eighteenth century these two groups began to use different arguments to express their complaints. They based these complaints on a new philosophy that grew out of a period in European intellectual history that was called the Enlightenment.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment followed the lead of natural scientists such as Sir Isaac Newton. Newton had found laws which governed the movement of heavenly bodies. The philosophers of the Enlightenment tried to find similar laws that governed people's lives. These new ideas spread rapidly through Europe, particularly through the educated French classes. They provided intellectual reasons for revolt.

Reading 39 consists of excerpts from two of these philosophers, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. As you read, keep the following questions in mind:

1. What was the state of nature according to Locke and Rousseau? What did people gain and lose by leaving it?
2. How did these two philosophers justify revolt against an established government?

Two Treatises of Government, 1690

John Locke, a contemporary of Sir Isaac Newton, published Two Treatises of Government in 1690. Locke was trying to justify the Glorious Revolution and England's new government. His work later supplied the philosophical support for revolutions in both the American colonies and in France.

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1690). Language simplified.

►How can you support the statement that all men are equal when people differ so much in talents, abilities, and character?

To understand political power, we must consider the condition in which nature puts all men. It is a state of perfect freedom to do as they wish and dispose of themselves and their possessions as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature. They need not ask permission or the consent of any other man.

The state of nature is also a state of equality. No one has more power or authority than another. Since all human beings have the same advantages and the use of the same skills, they should be equal to each other. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it. Reason is that law. It teaches that all men are equal and independent, and that no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. All men are made by one all-powerful and wise Maker. They are all servants of one Master who sent them into the world to do His business. He has put men naturally into a state of independence, and they remain in it until they choose to become members of a political society.

If man in the state of nature is free, if he is absolute lord of his own person and possessions, why will he give up his freedom? Why will he put himself under the control of any person or institution? The obvious answer is that rights in the state of nature are constantly exposed to the attacks of others. Since every man is equal and since most men do not concern themselves with equity and justice, the enjoyment of rights in the state of nature is unsafe and insecure. Hence each man joins in society with others to preserve his life, liberty, and property.

Since men hope to preserve their property by establishing a government, they will not want that government to destroy this objective. When legislators try to destroy or take away the property of the people, or try to reduce them to slavery, they put themselves into a state of war with the people who can then refuse to obey the laws. When legislators try to gain or give someone else absolute power over the lives, liberties, and property of the people, they abuse the power which the people had put into their hands. It is then the privilege of the people to establish a new legislature to provide for their safety and

security. These principles also hold true for the executive who helps to make laws and carry them out.

Perhaps some will say that the people are ignorant and discontented and that a government based on their unsteady opinion and uncertain humor will be unstable. They might argue that no government can exist for long if the people may set up a new legislature whenever they do not like the old one. But people do not easily give up their old forms of government. In England, for example, the unwillingness of the people to throw out their old constitution has kept us to, or brought us back to, our old legislature of king, lords, and commons.

However, it will be said that this philosophy may lead to frequent rebellion. To which I answer, such revolutions are not caused by every little mismanagement in public affairs. But if a long train of abuses, lies, and tricks make a government's bad intentions visible to the people, they cannot help seeing where they are going. It is no wonder that they will then rouse themselves, and try to put the rule into hands which will secure to them the purpose for which government was originally organized.

The Social Contract, 1762

Jean Jacques Rousseau was one of the most influential of the eighteenth-century philosophers. Although he disagreed with some of Locke's ideas, his writings generally supported Locke.

I assume, for the sake of argument, that mankind at some time reached a point when the disadvantages of remaining in a state of nature outweighed the advantages. Under these conditions, the original state of nature could no longer endure. The human race would have perished if it had not changed its way.

Men, being human, cannot develop new powers. But they can unite and control the powers they already have. Men in the state of nature could get together, pooling their strength in a way that would permit them to meet any challenge. They had to learn to work together under central direction.

A real concentration of human powers could be brought about only by an agreement among individual men. But each individual man relies on his own strength and his own freedom of action to protect and preserve himself. How can he limit his strength and his freedom of action without injuring himself?

Some form of association must be found which can rally the whole community for the protection of the person and property of each of

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, as quoted in Edwin Fenton, 32 *Problems in World History* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), pp. 126-128, copyright © 1964 by Scott, Foresman and Company. Reprinted by permission.

its citizens in such a way that each man, because he is a voluntary member of the association, still obeys his own will and hence remains as free as he was before. That is the basic problem solved by the social contract.

The essence of the social contract can be stated simply: Each individual surrenders all his rights to the community. Since each man surrenders his rights without reservation, all are equal. And because all are equal, it is to everyone's interest to make life pleasant for his fellows.

Since all rights have been surrendered to the community without reservation, no one has any claim against the group. If any rights were left to individuals, then each man would try to extend those rights he had reserved for himself. This situation would mean that a state of nature still existed. All rights must be surrendered; none may be reserved.

The heart of the idea of the social contract may be stated simply: Each of us places his person and authority under the supreme direction of the general will; and the group receives each individual as an indivisible part of the whole.

In order that the social contract may not be a mere empty formula, everyone must understand that any individual who refuses to obey the general will must be forced by his fellows to do so. This is a way of saying that it may be necessary to force a man to be free; freedom in this case being obedience to the will of all.

FOR THOUGHT:

On which groups in French society would the ideas of Locke and Rousseau have the most influence? Why?

► Should an individual surrender all of his rights to a community, or should he keep some rights?

40 THE AIMS OF THE REVOLUTION

Citizenship can be divided into three parts—civil rights, political rights, and social rights. Civil rights give citizens liberty of the person; freedom of speech, thought and faith; the right to own property; and the right to justice. Political rights give citizens the power to take part in political decision-making by voting and holding political offices. Social rights give citizens economic security through such measures as social security laws and the right to a free public education.

Citizenship has been restricted to a small select group throughout most of history. Even this group has lacked some of the rights of a full citizen, particularly political rights. In modern times, citizenship

has gradually been extended to more and more people. In some modern societies, all citizens enjoy all three parts of citizenship. They have civil rights, political rights, and social rights.

The French Revolution marked the first step toward full citizenship for the great majority of the French people. The revolution was triggered by a governmental financial crisis. Louis XVI had spent vast fortunes on wars, among them the American Revolutionary War. Attempts to reform the tax system in order to raise more money failed because of the opposition of the nobility and clergy. Both of these groups did not have to pay most taxes. Therefore, Louis decided to call a meeting of the Estates-General, the parliamentary body which had last met in 1614. He hoped this body would establish new taxes.

The Estates-General immediately became deadlocked about how to vote. In the past, the three estates had met separately, and each estate had cast one vote. This system made it possible for the clergy and the nobility, who made up the First and Second Estates, to outvote everyone else. Yet these two estates made up less than 3 percent of the total population. The Third Estate wanted every delegate to vote as an individual because it had as many representatives in the Estates-General as the other two estates combined. Since some members of the nobility and the clergy sympathized with the objectives of the Third Estate, this reform would give power to the group who represented most of the people of France.

Six weeks after the Estates-General met for the first time, the members of the Third Estate declared themselves the National Assembly. They invited the First and Second Estates to join them as the new lawmaking body of France. Three days later, Louis XVI barred the Assembly from its meeting place. Its members, joined by a few people from the nobility and clergy, then gathered in an indoor tennis court. They swore to continue meeting until they had drafted a constitution for the nation. After a period of indecision, Louis finally gave in to their demands.

Early in July, rumors began to circulate that Louis' troops were approaching Paris to dissolve the Assembly. Angry mobs of unemployed and hungry workers began to roam the streets, demanding food and looking for weapons. On July 14, a mob attacked the Bastille, an old fortress used for a prison, and killed most of the guards. Riots then broke out all over the countryside. Peasants broke into manor houses, destroying records of manorial dues and tax payments. A revolution had begun that kept Europe in turmoil for twenty-five years and marked the first major step toward citizenship for most of France's people.

Reading 40 contains two documents written in 1789 that give evidence about this revolutionary period. As you read them, think about the following questions:

1. What complaints about the way in which French society is organized can you find in *What Is the Third Estate*?
2. What rights did the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen grant to the French people?

A Revolutionary Pamphlet

Following Louis XVI's announcement that the Estates-General would meet, many people wrote pamphlets urging major changes in the Old Regime. Abbé Sieyès was one of the most influential of these pamphlet writers. He had been a minor administrative official in the French church and a reader of Locke and Rousseau. He published What Is the Third Estate? in January 1789.

The plan of this pamphlet is very simple. We have three questions to ask:

What is the Third Estate? Everything.

What has it been in the political order? Nothing.

What does it demand? To become something.

What does a nation need to function and become prosperous? It needs private enterprise to make goods and services and public functions to govern.

Private enterprise involves four groups of people. The first group is made up of families who farm. The second group takes these farm products and develops them for use by consumers. Merchants and dealers make up the third group. They carry the goods to consumers and manage trade. The fourth group is made up of other productive people essential to a society. They range from domestic servants to scientists, lawyers, or doctors. These four groups of people do the work which supports society. Who does this work? The members of the Third Estate.

Public functions can also be classified under four well-known headings: the Sword, the Robe, the Church, and the Administration. Members of the Third Estate make up nineteen-twentieths of these groups. They do all the really hard work which the privileged orders refuse to do. The First and Second Estates hold only the well-paid and honorary positions. They have said to the Third Estate: "Whatever your services or talents, you shall go thus far and no farther. It is not appropriate that you should be honored."

If the privileged orders were abolished, the nation would be something more rather than something less. Thus, what is the Third Estate? Everything, but an everything that is shackled and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged orders? Everything, but an everything free and flourishing. Nothing can progress without it. Everything

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès.
Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat?
(Paris: 1789). Translated by
Edwin Fenton.

The Sword refers to the military. The Robe refers to the law and the administration of justice.

► On what basis should people receive honors in a society?

would go better, however, without the other estates. The nobility does not really belong to the social organization. Indeed, it may be a burden on the nation.

All parts of the government's executive power have fallen to the group which furnishes the leaders of the Church, the Robe, and the Sword. Nobles prefer each other out of a spirit of brotherhood. In truth, the nobles reign.

It is the court and not the monarch that rules France. The court makes, unmakes, appoints, and discharges ministers, and creates and appoints people to positions. The court is the head of the immense aristocracy which overruns all of France.

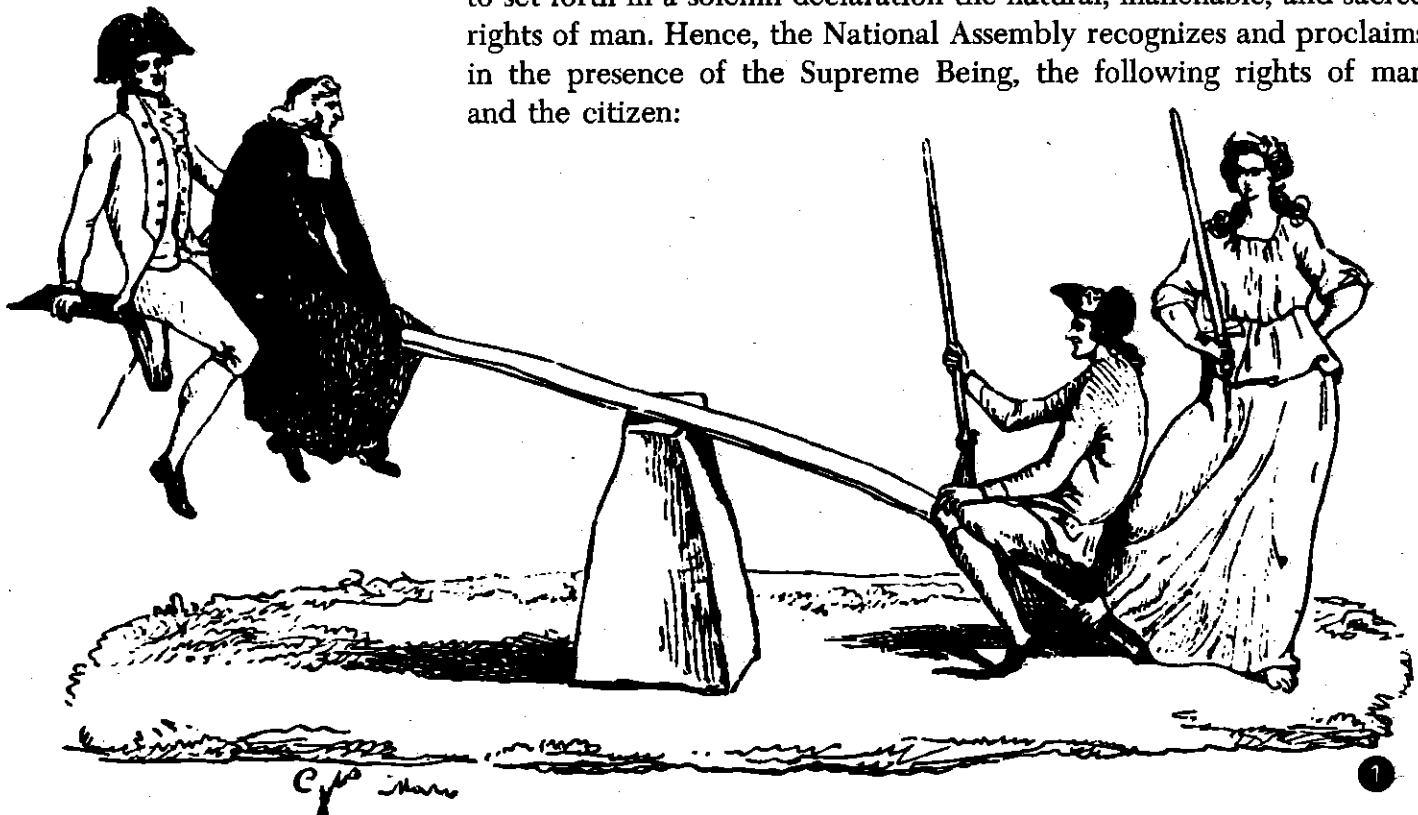
The court refers to the nobles at Versailles.

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

On August 26, 1789, after ten days of deliberation, the National Assembly adopted the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. The Declaration was intended as a pledge of what the members of the Assembly wanted to accomplish.

Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), pp. 351-353. Language simplified.

The representatives of the French people have been organized as a National Assembly. They believe that ignorance, neglect, or contempt of the rights of man lead to corrupt governments. They have decided to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man. Hence, the National Assembly recognizes and proclaims in the presence of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and the citizen:



CETTE FOIS-CI LA JUSTICE EST DU COTÉ DU PLUS FORT.

Sovereignty means the ultimate source of power.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.
2. All governments should try to protect man's natural rights. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
3. Sovereignty rests in the people. No group or individual may exercise any authority that does not come directly from the people.
4. Liberty consists of being able to do anything that does not injure anyone else. A person may exercise his natural rights so long as he does not interfere with the natural rights of others. The limits to which natural rights may be exercised can be determined by law.
5. Law can only forbid activities that are harmful to society.
6. Law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to take part personally or through his representative in making laws. All citizens are equal in the eyes of the law. They are equally eligible for all honors and for all public positions according to their abilities.
7. No man shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned without following the practices laid down in the laws.
8. The law shall provide for such punishments as are strictly and obviously necessary. No one shall be punished for a law passed after an act was committed.
9. All persons shall be held innocent until proved guilty. Hence, if a person is arrested, he shall not be treated more severely than required to arrest him.
10. No one shall be disturbed because of his opinions, including his views about religion, provided he does not disturb the public order established by the law.
11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Every citizen may speak, write and print freely, being responsible for any abuses of this freedom as defined by the law.
13. Taxes must be assessed on all citizens equally in proportion to their ability to pay.
14. Citizens have the right to determine whether a tax is necessary, to consent to it freely, to supervise how tax money is used, and to decide how taxes should be assessed and paid and how long they should last.
17. Property is a sacred and inviolable right. No one may be deprived of property unless public necessity clearly requires it and unless he receives a just payment.

This provision is commonly called an *ex post facto* law.

FOR THOUGHT:

Which part of citizenship—civil rights, political rights, or social rights—seems most important in these two documents?

41 THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE WESTERN HERITAGE

A HISTORICAL ESSAY

The French Revolution brought sweeping changes to France's political, social, and economic systems. It was the beginning of the French people's long struggle to change their status from subjects to citizens. Like the American Revolution, the revolt in France had an influence far beyond its own borders. By establishing the belief that freedom and citizenship could be won by violent revolt, it encouraged other countries to follow in its path.

The French Revolution took place in what was in many ways the most advanced country of its age. France had been a unified nation for centuries with a common language, common traditions, and a common set of loyalties. It was the center of the Enlightenment, which was the eighteenth-century intellectual movement. Moreover, France was potentially the most powerful nation in Europe. It had the largest population united under a single government, and its agriculture and trade were prospering. The French Revolution was not an uprising of Europe's poorest people. Instead, it was an attempt by most of the French people to overthrow political, social, and economic institutions that had not changed with the times.

Agriculture dominated the economy of eighteenth-century France. More than 80 percent of the population was rural. But the French peasants were no longer serfs, as some peasants elsewhere in Europe still were. In fact, peasants owned about 40 percent of the land, and they rented or worked on most of the rest.

Nevertheless, the French peasants had two major complaints. First, they objected to the remaining feudal rights of the nobles. These rights included the right to collect various fees and dues, the right to control village mills, bake ovens, and wine presses, and the right to hunt on peasants' lands. Second, the peasants objected to unequal taxation. They had to pay many taxes from which the nobles, the clergy, and many wealthy members of the middle class were exempt.

Most wealthy people who were not nobles had made their fortunes in trade, as lawyers, or as government officials. But though their fortunes were rising, their prestige and power were not. Better educated than the nobility, they resented the privileges that society granted to nobles. Many of these people read the works of Locke, Rousseau, and other

Britain led France in at least two ways, its parliamentary government and its new industrialism.

► Should people resent others who have privileges that they do not have?

philosophers of the Enlightenment and found intellectual reasons for their dissatisfaction.

Workers in the towns also had complaints. Like other non-nobles, they had no influence in the government and low status in the society. During the eighteenth century, prices rose three times as fast as wages, keeping down the workers' standard of living. In the late 1780's, unemployment and a sharp rise in the price of bread made their lives even worse.

The nobility had been regaining power in the society since the death of Louis XIV. By the 1780's, they once again held most of the top positions in the government, the army, and the Church. They paid little attention to their manors except to collect fees and taxes, and they lived in the king's court at Versailles or in one of the cities. But the nobles had no formal way to influence the king's decisions. Many nobles wanted to have a role in the political system, and they resented the absolutist nature of the king's rule.

In England, Parliament had played an increasingly important role in government for centuries. But the French kings had not called a meeting of the Estates-General, the French parliament, since 1614. They gave their subjects neither civil nor political nor social rights. Their constant wars stretched the financial resources of their governments. In the 1780's, war debts, the out-of-date tax system, and a slight depression brought on a governmental economic crisis. When the nobility refused to pay new taxes, Louis XVI decided to call a meeting of the Estates-General.

Among these wars was the American Revolution. Louis XVI sided against England, spending large sums for military expenses and in loans to America.

French society was divided into three estates—the clergy, the nobility, and everyone else. Each estate was represented in the Estates-General. Traditionally each estate met and voted separately. The votes of two estates were required to pass a bill. But the Third Estate had as many delegates as the first two combined. Its members demanded that all representatives should vote as individuals. When the king refused to agree, the members of the Third Estate, joined by a few nobles and clergy, proclaimed themselves the National Assembly.

Although Louis XVI tried unsuccessfully to prevent the Assembly from meeting, he finally backed down and allowed it to meet. But secretly he began to gather his troops together. Rumors spread that the nobles were also gathering their forces. As a result, first unrest, then panic, and finally riots broke out in the cities and the countryside.

To restore order and legalize the revolution, the National Assembly ended the privileged positions of the nobles on August 4, 1789. Within two weeks, the Assembly also passed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. These two acts gave civil rights to French citizens. They mark the first step in the development of full citizenship for the nation.



During the following two years, the National Assembly worked on a new constitution. It created a limited monarchy somewhat like that of Great Britain. The king became subject to the laws passed by the National Assembly. But delegates to the Assembly were to be chosen by electors. Property qualifications and other restrictions limited the vote to about 50,000 men, only a small minority of the French people.

The new government, launched on October 1, 1791, collapsed about ten months later. Even before this government had taken over, many nobles, representing much of France's leadership, had fled France. These so-called emigrés, supported by Austria and Prussia, organized counter-revolutionary forces on the borders of France. Many of the clergy had joined the emigrés when the government took over land belonging to the Church and sold it to raise money. A short time later,

How did the cartoonist portray the change in the condition of the peasants brought about by the events of August 4, 1789?

The emigrés were nobles who left, or emigrated from, the country.

Louis and his family tried to join the emigrés. But they were captured, returned to Paris, and imprisoned.

Finally, war drained the new government of its resources. The Assembly had declared war on Austria and on the emigrés in April 1792. Prussia soon joined the forces against France. Because France had lost most of its officers who had been nobles, it suffered severe defeats. By the summer of 1792, the new government could no longer defend the revolution.

Deputies to a National Convention met in September 1792 to draft a new constitution setting up a republic. Radicals began to win control. Led by an extreme group called the Jacobins, the Convention accused Louis XVI of treason, tried and convicted him, and sent him to the guillotine in January, 1793.

A guillotine was a machine with a heavy blade used for beheading.

Louis' execution marked the beginning of the Jacobin rise to power. Jacobins soon filled all twelve positions on the Committee of Public Safety, set up originally as a sort of war cabinet. Led by Maximilian Robespierre, the Committee began a reign of terror. They tried, convicted, and executed hundreds of people whom they accused of counter-revolutionary activities. In a great outburst of nationalism, the French enthusiastically supported their new government.

In early summer 1794, the Jacobins stepped up the executions. Nearly fifteen hundred people perished under the blade of the guillotine within six weeks. The terror had gone too far. Robespierre's enemies set out to remove him. Late in July, he too fell victim to the guillotine. The National Convention continued to meet until October 1795, but it removed the Jacobins from power and drafted a new constitution. During this long period, the civil rights proclaimed early in the revolution were ignored by the revolutionary government.

In 1795 a new government was set up. It was called the Directory because five Directors, chosen by a two-house legislature, made up the executive branch. Only the wealthy could vote for members of the legislature. The Directory faced heavy opposition. Many Frenchmen wanted to return to a limited monarchy, while poorer people demanded a voice in the government. The Directory held on chiefly because some of its successful generals won widespread public support for the government.

Napoleon Bonaparte was the most notable of these generals. After winning several sensational military victories, he schemed to take control of the government. In a coup d'état in 1799, Napoleon forced the legislature to accept his leadership and to adopt a constitution that gave him supreme power. By 1803, he had brought the fighting to a temporary halt, stabilized the government, and begun to strengthen the gains of the revolution. In 1804, he became emperor, a title which the French people supported by a plebiscite. France had returned officially to absolutist rule.

A plebiscite means submitting an issue to the people for a vote.



NAPOLEON'S EMPIRE IN 1810



French Empire



States controlled by Napoleon



States allied with Napoleon

During the next eleven years, France fought one foreign war after another with virtually all of Europe. The French won victory after victory, spreading the ideals of the revolution across Europe. Finally, England, Austria, Russia, and Prussia combined forces to defeat and capture Napoleon. He gave up his throne and was exiled to the island of Elba. The French then restored the grandson of Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, to the throne and set up a limited monarchy. But Napoleon escaped from Elba in 1815. For a hundred days he seized control of the nation once more until he was defeated again at the battle of Waterloo. This time he was exiled to the distant island of St. Helena. Louis XVIII returned to the throne.

But Napoleon had succeeded in reorganizing the nation. A child of both the Enlightenment and the revolution, he had unusual capacities as a politician. His government put down outlaws, imposed and collected taxes from everyone, and invited all Frenchmen who would work

The son of Louis XVI, who would have been Louis XVII, had died.

with the government to return to the nation. Napoleon reformed government administration by opening public service to any citizen with talent. Public offices could no longer be inherited, bought or sold, or given out as favors. In addition, Napoleon assured the civil right of religious freedom for all religious groups.

Napoleon also combined the three hundred legal systems of the Old Regime, a number of parliamentary and royal laws, and the thousands of laws enacted by revolutionary assemblies. Five legal codes, the so-called Napoleonic Codes, emerged. These codes included a new property law that eliminated the old feudal rights.

But political rights were another matter. Napoleon wrote a new constitution that appeared to set up parliamentary institutions and granted universal male suffrage. Yet actually Napoleon ran the state. He shared the decision-making power with no one.

Nevertheless, the French Revolution had remade the society. It abolished legal classes and opened up a new social system in which men and women with talent could rise in social status. It changed the economic order by sweeping away feudal rights and transferring ownership of all Church lands and many of the lands of the nobility to others. And it changed the political system by opening public offices to everyone and establishing major civil rights throughout the society. A start had been made on the long process by which the subjects of Louis XVI became full citizens of the modern French republic. And in nations throughout the western world, the principles of the revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—inspired men and women to overthrow absolutist governments and set up new societies in which they too won full rights as citizens.

Individual and Group Activities for Chapter 9

For full descriptions of these activities, turn to the **Student Book of Activities and Readings** included among the materials for individual and group activities.

Activity 9A: Interpretation of the lifestyle of Napoleon (individual)

This activity shows a group of pictures that illustrate the lifestyle of Napoleon in the years following the French Revolution. In a brief essay based on these pictures, discuss whether Napoleon thought of himself as representative of the ideals of the revolution or the monarchy.

Activity 9B: Comparison of a contemporary national revolution with the French Revolution (individual)

Select a contemporary national revolution and investigate it. Then write a short paper comparing the revolution that you have selected with the French Revolution.